

Meet . . .

Owner-Handler

## Melanie Yellish

Karmel Great Danes

I've been showing Great Danes for 4 1/2 years and occasionally help my sister show her Schipperkes.

### 2) Your kennel name and how you got it.

My kennel name is Karmel; this is a combination of parts of my father's name Carl, my mother's name Kathryn and my name.

### 3) Where do you live?

I live in Highland California which is in San Bernardino County.

### 4) Where do you travel to show?

Most of the shows I attend are in Southern California; however, I have also shown in Northern California, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon and Washington.

### 5) How many shows do you attend in a year?

Last year I was campaigning my Special which put me on the road a lot attending 120 shows.

### 6) Have you ever hired and/or used professional handlers and for what purpose?

Yes, in early 2011 I tore my Achilles tendon and was unable to show until it healed.

### 7) What made you decide to owner-handle your Great Danes?

In 2008 I was looking for a Great Dane puppy. As a teenager I worked for a breeder-handler of poodles and knew that dog shows was the place to find a reputable breeder. After attending my first show I thought, I can do this what a great hobby.

### 8) What are the greatest advantages of owner-handling your dogs?

Of course saving money by not paying handler fees is a huge advantage and the satisfaction of doing it yourself is great! It also takes time to develop a relationship between dog and handler, but as an owner-handler you already have a strong bond with your dog.

### 9) What are the biggest challenges of owner-handling your dogs?

That same bond that works for you can also work against you, your dog needs to understand that the show ring can be fun but it's not the same as being at home or out for a leisurely walk.

### 10) What do owner-handlers need to consider if they want to be competitive in the ring?

Attend handling classes, know your breed standard, this is what the judges are looking for. Understand your dog's weaknesses and strengths (there is no perfect dog) learn how to best exhibit your dog. I've been very lucky, a lot of professional handlers have given me pointers on how to best show my dog. If you receive suggestions try them, they may not all work for you but you won't know unless you try.

### 11) Do you feel your dog has ever been over-looked in the ring by the judge because you are an owner-handler and if yes please describe.



I believe that most judges only consider the dogs and not the person on the other end of the lead; however, although few, there have been occasions that have made me wonder. There was one specific occasion that the judge appeared to be more interested in looking at who was handling the dog more than the dog.

**12) Do you feel there is any stigma against owner-handlers in Great Danes and if yes please explain.**

No, I don't believe so. Most everyone has been very supportive and helpful.

What tips would you give a new owner-handler to help them step up their game?

Spend time watching the top professionals and their handling techniques. Keep in mind you are showing your dog not yourself. Always be courteous of the other handlers in the ring, when at all possible don't crowd them or their dogs.

**13) What is the most valuable advice you ever received about handling your own dogs from a professional handler?**

Always be ready and keep an eye on the judge, you never know when the judge is going to look at your dog.

**14) What is the most helpful technique you ever learned just by watching professional handlers?**

If your dog isn't moving the way you want or he's just being silly on the down and back it's okay to take your dog back and try it again.

**15) What are some common mistakes you see owner-handlers committing in the ring?**

When stacking their dog some owner-handlers have a tendency to over extend the dog in the rear or set the hind legs too far apart. The hocks should be straight up and down and the space between the hind legs should be natural and not too far apart.

**16) What have been some of your show ring successes as an owner-handler?**

My special, SunStrike Spellbinder at Karmel, 'Huey' has been awarded multiple Best in Specialty Shows, Best of Breeds and has receiving Group placements 1 through 4. This resulted in Huey ranking Number 9 Great Dane in the Nation for 2013 as well as Top Great Dane for the Great Dane Club of California.

**17) What are some of the most rewarding things about owner-handling for you?**

The satisfaction of competing with the professional handlers and being able to accomplish everything I did in 2013.

**18) Most professional handlers began as owner-handlers. What keeps you from taking that same route?**

If I was younger I would consider it.

**19) Who is your favorite judge and why?**

It's difficult to mention just one. I like the judges that look for structure and movement, form and function. The judges that keep in mind that the Great Dane is a Working breed and what it was bred to do.

**Bonus Question! (Please answer!) If the mockumentary movie "Best in Show" made a sequel with you as one of the characters, what famous actor/actress would play YOU?**

Bette Midler